

and Culture, shows that disciplines and specialties need not remain deaf to each other.

The winter 1996 J. Crew catalog of clothing and accessories depicts a young man dressed up to look disheveled and bookish, wearing oversized horn-rimmed glasses and a shapeless tweedy outfit. In bold type these words appear across his crotch: "men's style canon . . . deconstructed" (30). I would want my students to know what that language means and what it's doing over his crotch and to imagine by what trajectory some former English major might have come to earn a living writing such advertising copy. Would the literary or cultural studies be more likely to produce informed consumers capable of articulating their complex relation to that image? Whatever it takes is cool.

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My attempts to consider cultural studies and the literary as isolated, distinct, and at least potentially antagonistic created overwhelming cognitive dissonance in me, even though I am aware of the institutional, ideological, and intellectual context of contemporary North American higher education, in which such a confrontation not only makes sense but is indeed crucial to enact and explore. My mental impasse leads me to suggest, through a personal testimonial, a tentative blueprint for the constant, inescapable merging of the literary and the cultural in my ongoing apprenticeship of academic teaching and scholarly research.

The first novel that I can recall reading as a child growing up in Poland was *In Desert and Wilderness*, by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of *Quo Vadis* (1896), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905 but who was principally renowned in his native country for historical novels that romanticized Poland's past and powerfully shaped the national historical imagination. *In Desert and Wilderness*, a book destined for "young adults," tells the dramatic story of a precocious Polish boy and a charming English girl bravely making their way across Sub-Saharan Africa after escaping from Sudanese warriors, rebels against the Egyptian government and British colonial rule, who had held the children hostage. The pair's encounters with elephants, lions, and savage tribes, along with young Staś's constant displays of chivalry toward his delicate charge (whose age was approximately my own), sent the first shivers of reading pleasure down my spine, a pleasure that, I believe, was genuinely literary.

I was reminded of Sienkiewicz's novel recently when, attending a talk by a historian who touched on events that unfolded in Sudan in the late nineteenth century, I was

jolted by the recognition of a reality that I had first apprehended in another form and context. In my excitement, I decided to reread the novel and found the experience as riveting as the first reading, although for different reasons, since I now held a doctoral degree in literature from a North American university and was soaking up post-structuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theory. Despite my discovery of the novel's painfully obvious artistic flaws, I was fascinated by its entangled cultural meanings, from its pervasive if unexceptional racism and naively conservative sexual politics to its ingenious opposition of Sudanese anticolonial rebellion and the partitioned Poland's struggle for national independence. My pleasure in these new riches was as intense as the literary delight I had taken in the novel some thirty years earlier.

Without my experience of the novel's literary appeal, I doubt that I would ever have bothered to reread the text and thus to explore its less innocent but more complex aspects. The seductive power of literariness brings readers and texts together, keeps us reading and rereading, and ultimately makes us desire to teach others to read. However, had I remained the culturally and ideologically naive reader that I was those thirty-odd years ago, my second reading would have been merely a pale reenactment (or, more likely, a disillusioned retraction) of my early fascination. One of the most compelling qualities of the literary text is its fine-tuned ability to engage the manifold realities of the world from which it springs in an ongoing dialogue that can only be appreciated fully by readers who recognize that literature is as implicated in and relevant to the dirty business of reality as economic disputes, scientific arguments, and political campaigns.

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At the present moment, and with an increasing intensity that is the product of reactive anxiety, the assertion is made that the growing significance of cultural studies in the humanities (and, indeed, in the social sciences) has begun to overshadow or displace the study of literature as literary critics and teachers have known and practiced it. The specifics of the literary and the virtues of a literary sensibility, traditionalists and critical theorists both argue, are being blurred if not drowned by the rising tide of cultural studies. Leaving aside the empirical falsity of these claims—cultural studies and the associated developments in postcolonial studies, minority studies, queer studies, and women's studies remain a small percentage of offerings in literature departments, according to MLA surveys (Bettina J. Huber, "What's Being Read in Survey Courses? Findings from a 1990–91 MLA Survey of En-